Azma files defamation suit against PA Opp leader

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari has filed a defamation suit against Opposition Leader in Punjab Assembly Moeen Qureshi seeking damages of Rs800 million.

The minister approached the Lahore Defamation Tribunal under section 3 of the Punjab Defamation Act 2024.

She filed the claim against the opposition leader, alleging that he made baseless and fabricated accusations against her.

According to the suit, the opposition leader falsely claimed that the Punjab information minister facilitated the entry of 150 to 200 paid individuals into the Punjab Assembly during the visit of KP Chief Minister Sohail Afridi.

The suit states that the controversial statement was widely aired on television and circulated on social media, reaching millions of viewers.

It maintains that the allegations were broadcast during a TV talk show and shared through the official PTI social media account.

Ms Bokhari contends that the false accusations have caused a serious damage to her reputation, dignity, and credibility.

She asks the tribunal to direct Mr Qureshi to pay damages accordingly.

Another 90 Katcha gangsters surrender

By Our Correspondent

DERA GHAZI KHAN: District police claimed on Saturday that another 90 gangsters from four notorious criminal gangs in the Katcha area of Rajanpur had surrendered.

Police said the surrender took place at the Sonmiyani Police station where the Lound, Sikhani, Lathani, and Dullani gangs, who were active in the Rijwani, Kopra, and Chak Bailey Shah areas, laid down their arms.

The arrested dacoits included several high-value targets including Mujeed Lound, the reported head of the Lound gang. He was one of the most wanted criminals in the area, with a bounty of Rs10 million on his head.

The total number of gangsters who had laid down their arms in Rajanpur over the past five days was now 187.

Rajanpur DPO Muhammad Imran said the operations under the Safe Punjab Initiative would continue with full force until peace was restored. He reiterated the police's commitment for relentless action, urging all remaining criminals in the Katcha area to surrender or face the full force of the law.

Hammad, six others declared POs in May 9 riots case

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: An anti-terrorism court on Friday declared former federal minister Hammad Azhar and six other suspects proclaimed offenders (POs) in another case of May 9 riots.

ATC-I Judge Manzer Ali Gill passed the order on a prosecution application and issued perpetual arrest warrants for seven absconding suspects.

The other suspects include Zubair Khan Niazi, Akbar Khan, Masood Ahmed Subhani, Arsalan bin Basharat, Farooq Anjum and Habib Ahmed.

The prosecution told the court that the suspects were granted multiple opportunities to appear but failed to do so.

It was further stated that the suspects went into hiding to avoid arrest and did not appear even after the issuance of arrest warrants.

Racecourse police station had registered a case related to the attack on GOR-gate near Club Chowk.

According to the prosecution, some of the suspects including Hammad Azhar have already been declared POs in several other cases of May 9 attacks.

LAHORE: As people enjoy pleasant outing at Fort Road Food Street following Thursday night rain, hoteliers await anxiously the three-day Basant festivities which are expected to attract a large number of enthusiasts from across Punjab. — White Star / M. Arif

Maryam finalises plans for holding safe Basant

SOPs' violators to be punished with up to five-year jail term and Rs5 million fine

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE:Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Friday finalised all preparations for the three-day Basant festival to be held in Lahore from Feb 6 to 8, urging people to celebrate it in a safe manner.

Presiding over a meeting on Basant arrangements here, the chief minister said she wanted to restore joy and cultural celebrations to the people of Punjab.

"Punjab's rich traditions have been pushed aside for years. Basant is an 800-year-old cultural heritage of Punjab and the world recognises Punjab's vibrant culture," she said.

The CM said Punjab belonged to everyone and all communities had the right to celebrate their festivals freely, including Eid, Holi, Christmas and Ramazan.

She recalled the revival of the Horse and Cattle show after three decades, saying it would also be held this year.

Announcing strict safety measures, the chief minister said a comprehensive Basant safety plan had been finalised to prevent accidents associated with kite flying.

"Lahore has been divided into Red, Yellow and Green zones, and only cotton kite string made of nine threads will be allowed. Nylon and metallic strings are strictly banned, with violators facing up to five-year jail terms and fines up to Rs5 million," she said and added that illegal kite flying, other than the notified dates, would invite imprisonment and fines, while parents and guardians would be held responsible for underage or illegal kite flying.

"String reels (charkhi) are banned, only hand-held spools (pinna) will be allowed, and kite and gudda sizes have been fixed.

To protect motorcyclists, the government will install free safety rods on one million motorcycles. Entry into the Red Zone will only be allowed for bikes fitted with safety rods, while riding without a rod will attract a Rs2,000 fine. Citizens providing information about banned kite flying will be rewarded," she said.

The chief minister said more than 2,150 manufacturers, traders and vendors had been registered, while over 600 FIRs had already been registered against violators ahead of Basant, with hundreds arrested and tens of thousands of illegal kites seized. More than 10,000 surety bonds have also been obtained to ensure compliance.

A detailed traffic and transport plan has been prepared. Under the Basant Transport Plan, free rides will be provided on Orange Line, Metro Bus, electric buses and feeder buses, along with 500 additional buses. Ride-hailing services will also facilitate tens of thousands of rides to discourage motorcycle use and reduce risk.

"For security and emergency response, 4,000 police personnel, besides Suthra Punjab workers, will be deployed. Plan for police, Rescue 1122, fire brigade and ambulances have been finalised, while 24/7 control rooms have been set up at the Punjab Safe Cities Authority and the commissioner office. CCTV cameras and drones will monitor the festival during the three (Basant) days," she said.

Appealing to citizens to ignore rumours and misinformation, the CM said Basant was being organised for safe enjoyment and public happiness and urged people to celebrate responsibly. She said that the Basant festival would kick offon the night of Feb 6 with formal celebrations beginning on Feb 7.

Privatisation secretary told to decide objections in pleas against PIA sell-off

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court has directed the federal secretary for privatisation to decide objections in two similar petitions challenging the sell-off of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

Justice Malik Awais Khalid passed two separate orders, disposing of as many petitions filed by Nabeel Javed Kahloon, a lawyer, and Hadayatullah Khan, the president of Peoples Unity, the PIA employees' union.

During the hearing, Advocate Kahloon, who represented both petitions, argued that the privatisation of the PIA was not in accordance with law. He said the whole process must be presented before the Council of Common Interest (CCI). The lawyer stated that the constitutional condition had not been followed by the government.

He pointed out that the company could not issue fresh shares as no amendment had been made in this regard and a bill for the purpose had also been withdrawn.

He said the PIA had been sold out at a nominal price as in estimate only Rs4bn would be transferred in the public exchequer. He claimed that massive public funds have been injected into the airline over decades and its sale to a private group is a matter of significant public interest.

Additional Attorney General Nasar Ahmad Mirza raised objection to the maintainability of the petition. He said the petition could not be entertained as it was a policy decision. He also clarified that the respondents were not issuing fresh shares but transferring the existing shares of the company.

Advocate Kahloon argued that the legal and constitutional objections highlighted in the petitions had never been addressed by any forum.

The additional attorney general suggested the court to remit the matter to the privatisation secretary to decide the objections raised by the petitioners after affording an opportunity of personal hearing.

The counsel said he has no objection if the objections are decided by upholding the principle of fairness and transparency.

The federal law officer assured the court that the secretary would decide the matter in accordance with law.

Justice Khalid referred the petitions to the privatisation secretary with a direction to hear the petitioners and pass a well-reasoned order after hearing all concerned strictly in accordance with law within two weeks. The judge instructed both petitioners to appear before the secretary on Jan 26 at 11am.

The Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP) had endorsed a Rs135bn bid from an Arif Habib Group-led consortium for a 75 percent stake in the airline.

The winning bid was approximately 35pc higher than the government`s reference price of Rs115bn. The consortium has pledged to invest an additional Rs80bn to Rs125bn into the airline for fleet modernisation and operational restructuring. **— Staff Reporter**

Four of a family asphyxiated by generator smoke

By Our Correspondent

TOBA TEK SINGH: Four members of the same family were asphyxiated at Adda Balochan in Kabirwala tehsil of Khanewal on Friday.

Nawan Shehr police said deceased Asif Nasir Baloch (32), a milk seller, started a diesel generator during an electric outage to keep his milk storage facility running but he and all three others of his family slept and did not shut the generator.

As a result, smoke from the generator accumulated in the room and all four family members were asphyxiated .

When he did not open the milk shop till 10am, local people scaled the wall and found all of them dead.

The deceased included Asif's wife, Nadia Bibi (28), and his two sons Azeem (7) and Danyal (6).

Painter of Lahore's forbidden vistas is no more

By Shoaib Ahmed

LAHORE: Renowned painter Iqbal Hussain quietly passed away in Lahore on Thursday last. The visual art fraternity has expressed deep sorrow and grief over his sad demise.

Many in the art community did not know about his death because for the last several years he was not in contact with the community. He had multiple medical complications. He was laid to rest on Thursday.

His Qul were held on Friday which were attended by artists and art students from the National College of Arts (NCA) and Punjab University.

Iqbal Hussain's work offered an insight into a way of life that is an ancient tradition, and portrays it with stark reality.

Hussain graduated from the NCA in 1974 and later taught at the college. After finishing his studies at the NCA in 1974, Hussain dedicated his career to painting women of his area–the red light area of Lahore. Iqbal was widely regarded as Pakistan's most fearless painter, known for his bold, unapologetic art that gave voice to the women of Lahore's Tibbi area, challenging societal taboos.

Through his powerful canvases, he documented lives often ignored, capturing pain, resilience and raw humanity with striking honesty. His work leaves behind a legacy that will continue to provoke thought, dialogue, and reflection for generations to come.

His teacher Salima Hashmi, the former principal of the NCA, speaking to *Dawn* said, "Iqbal was my student in the 1970s.

He was a serious and quiet student. When he took admission to the NCA, he was the first person from the red light area to come and study at a college.

"He often shared with me that what a big achievement this was simply to become a student at the NCA, and he was so grateful for that always. He was so serious about his work that in the final year, he decided that the topic of his thesis should be his area which was known as the 'red light area' of Lahore and he was very conscious that he needed to show the women in a very sympathetic light as real people, not only as symbols,"

Ms Hashmi said Iqbal was very known for the studies of women of all ages in his area and their lives. He was very devoted to his teacher Prof Khalid Iqbal.

Renowned painter Prof Dr Ajaz Anwar said Iqbal Hussain was his colleague at the NCA. He was a good painter, very good at portraits.

"He wanted to hold an exhibition at Alhamra but he was not allowed, because he wanted to put on display at Alhamra portraits of the women from the red light area." Mr Anwar added that as a painter Iqbal had his own individuality and used solid and glowing colours in his artworks.

Former executive director of Lahore Arts Council and visual artist Zulfiqar Zulfi said that Hussian was a master painter.

He taught at Alhamra ArT Centre for 15 years as an art teacher and taught at the Lahore Art Gallery.

In the 1980s his exhibition, consisting of red light area women portraits, was not allowed to be exhibited at Alhamra and in protest, he put on display his paintings at the Mall Road.

Exploring literature and resistance at ThinkFest

By Shoaib Ahmed

LAHORE: In a well-attended session titled, Literature as Resistance, renowned author and journalist Mohammed Hanif and Prof Shaista Sonnu Sirajuddin explored different aspects of literature on Friday on the inaugural day of ThinkFest.

The session was more of a conversation between the two speakers. Ms Sirajuddin gave a brief introduction of Hanif, saying that his broadcast in Punjabi from BBC was of great interest for many as he conveyed his thoughts to the ordinary people in a very cool and impressive manner. She said perhaps as author Hanif found an escape from the stress of journalism and started writing fiction.

To a question, Mr Hanif said he had had his schooling at military school system but ended up in civilian life. He held in high esteem his teacher who was also his editor, Razia Bhatti. He said Ms Bhatti told him how to tell a story, where to place sentences to create the effect of the story. In a lighter vein, he said Bhatti used to tell him that the media had never been free; perhaps that's why the journalist Hanif later started writing novels.

Ms Sirajuddin lauded Hanif for using wonderful metaphors and phrases. She said in his novels names of different characters were also of great significance such as Teddy Butt and Joseph Bhatti, and added that he used cinematic images in his novels, caricature in description with extremely interesting characters.

While talking about literature as resistance, Hanif mentioned Junaid Hafeez who had to Lahore for study, he was studying medicine here but he also started doing poetry, he read one of the poems of Junaid Hafeez. He said Hafeez was arrested and sentenced to death.

Sirajuddin further threw light on Hanif's writings, saying that Hanif used comedy as a weapon, a tradition that went back to the Greeks. She also mentioned Hanif's book, *Red Birds,* and the book drew experiences about flying. She read out excerpts from *Red Birds*.

CHILD MARRIAGE: In a session on 'Child Protection and Interventions against Early Marriage in Pakistan', was held at Afkar-e-Taza ThinkFest happening at Alhamra in which speakers explored various expects of child marriage in Pakistan.

Jennifer Malton from Unicef said: "80pc children in Pakistan experience violence, 26m children are out of school, eight million are engaged in child labour. A strong legal framework is there but there are gaps in it". She talked about child abuse and how could we improve things to protect children from abuse. She added that children were very important and it was important to listen to the wishes and thoughts of children. Children need quality education, quality nutritional food, she said academia and students should amplify the children's voice.

Justin Jones from Oxford talked about child marriage, saying that according to statistics, 21pc women were married off as a child in Sindh, southern Punjab, KP and some parts of Balochistan. He added that the outcome of such marriages were negative and domestic violence attached with child marriages. He underlined the need to have a second look at birth registration process when it comes to child marriage he also discussed the negative role of Nikah Khawn and the registrar in child marriages.

Sara Malkani, a lawyer from Karachi, explained the legal framework around child marriage, saying that Sindh was the first province that brought the change in age system as earlier marriage could take place when boy was 18 and girl was 16 and the bar for girl was also changed to 18.

Later, other provinces, though late, also followed this age bracket. She said when it comes child marriage law, its implementation in Sindh was very weak . She said many minor girls were entering into marriage of their choice as they eloped with minor boys. She stressed that rethinking legal frame work was important.

Muhammad Faisal Khalil from Oxford also discussed the negative role of Nikah Khawans and registrar in the case of child marriages.

He said the birth registration rate was very low and not much was invested into children and old people.